

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF EMAIL MARKETING

How to find prospects, build relationships and boost long-term, repeat sales through the inbox.

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Introduction to Email Marketing

Email is relatively new when compared to other forms of marketing communications.

When used **properly**, email marketing can be a fantastic way to reach out to prospects, nurture leads and stay on your customers' radar.

Email marketing can enhance the following areas of your business:

- 1) Lead generation**
- 2) Converting prospects into customers**
- 3) Maintaining communication with current customers**
- 4) Updating prospects and customers about new products or services**
- 5) Highlighting promotions and sales**
- 6) Helping your company stand out from the competition**
- 7) Establishing expertise in your industry**

It's also less invasive and annoying to your prospects than cold calling, less intimidating than physical networking and in most cases, less expensive than direct mail. It can also be much simpler and more accessible than other forms of inbound marketing like SEO and Social Media.

BUT...

It's also one of the most highly abused methods of reaching out to prospects, leads and customers. If you're anything like me, you receive at least some SPAM in your inbox every day.

But SPAM isn't only those outrageous emails promising instant riches, beauty or cries for help (and promises of recompense) from 'wealthy Nigerian' heads of state.

I also consider SPAM to be **unwanted** emails from people who have either gained contact information from me during a legitimate situation, such as a phone call or business meeting, or through more nefarious means like scraping an email address off of my website with the help of an online 'bot'.

But the bottom line is the same as it is with hardcore Spammers: *the content they send is of no interest now and will be of no interest in the future AND they're sending it to every single email address they have without caring about relevance.*

But there's a big difference between **UNWANTED** and **UNEXPECTED** emails.

An unexpected email doesn't necessarily fall into the category of SPAM, if it will be of value at some point - today, tomorrow, next month or even next year.

So, where does that leave us?

We want to provide content, sales messages or follow-ups to a list of people who will find our communications to be of high-value, either now or in the future.

Seems simple. *And it can be if done correctly.*

In this quick-start Email Marketing guide, I'm going to discuss a number of important topics related to email marketing that can result in massive gains to your company's bottom line.

Email Marketing and the Sales Process

Let's try and put email marketing in the proper perspective in terms of the overall sales process.

When someone walks into your business or gives you a call to inquire about your product or service they probably aren't going to buy anything right away.

This is just the way the sales process goes, people price shop, look at a selection of similar goods or services and take their time to make a decision. Perhaps your product is complex or has a high price tag and prospects need massaging before they buy.

Heck, maybe you just made a huge mess of the sale because you were tired or distracted.

There are any number of reasons you might not get an instant sale.

And that's fair enough. After all, consumers are the ones that are going to end up spending their hard-earned money and they want to be sure they make the right choice. Who can blame them?

So you can look at it in one of two ways.

The first is to throw your hands up in the air and say, “Oh well, too bad they didn’t buy from us. We’ll get the next customer.”

Your second option (and the smart one) is to get their contact details and follow up over time.

Let’s say you did screw up the sale, email marketing gives you an opportunity for a do-over and lets you provide a well-thought out sales pitch over time.

The fact is, even though people won’t necessarily buy anything from you the first time you speak with them, they might very well buy after the third, seventh or even twentieth time you get in touch.

That’s why email is such a great sales tool. But, you should be able to see that if used the wrong way, you run the risk of becoming a pest and alienating your prospects.

Effective List Building: Finding People to Send To

The most critical part of email marketing is building a targeted list.

That is, finding people who are going to be interested in your product or service at some point. As we all know, the sales cycle varies greatly from industry to industry. But for most of us, the fact is that we aren't going to make a sale at the first point of contact with a prospect.

So, for those businesses that have to cultivate clients and are unlikely to make a sale immediately, building a list can provide you with the opportunity to stay in touch and build credibility, so when the time comes for prospects to make a purchase decision, your company will be in the forefront of their mind.

On the other hand, if your sales cycle is shorter, a solid email list will allow you to upsell after the initial sale or sell more products to your customers over the long term. The bottom line is, a good email list will give you multiple opportunities to close the sale.

Ask for email addresses on the first point of contact – When someone calls or visits, simply ask for their email address. You'll be pleasantly surprised by how many people have no problem with handing over their contact information. Often times, for the stubborn prospect, the promise of information about special offers or sales will do the trick.

Ask upon checkout - You'll see that the majority of people won't mind, especially if you relate that you only send special offers out through email. Email is the new telephone number and most people will be happy to pass it over to you. Everyone knows that the easiest customer to get is the one you already have!

Put a sign-up feature on your website - This is an extremely effective method of getting email addresses. But, you have to offer people something in return, I'm not talking about a free product or service but rather, interesting information they will find valuable. You'll have to figure out what sort of content your customers and prospects might find interesting.

Offer a Free Report or White Paper - Ask for an email address in exchange for a special free report, white paper, industry newsletter or any other 'buzz piece' your prospects will be interested in.

Hold a draw - It might seem simple, but have you ever left your business card in a glass container at a restaurant? Well, you aren't the only one. People love entering free draws and this is another really simple, and low-cost way of getting people to leave you their information. Be sure to clarify you'll be sending follow-up emails to these people or they might be annoyed when they receive your communications.

Buy a list - This option is the least attractive for me personally. It's expensive and there are no guarantees you'll be getting any return on your investment. A list might seem fairly targeted but at the end of the day you just never know if it will work for you. Nonetheless, there are companies making millions every year by selling contact lists so there's obviously value in this approach for some people.

Use one or more of the ideas above and you will be well on your way to building a solid and targeted list of prospects. Be patient as it does take some time to create a list that will bring your company long-term benefits.

Subject Lines That Compel an 'Open'

The first goal when sending email marketing communications is obviously to get the recipient to open your email.

To encourage people to check out what your email is about, it's crucial to have a good '*subject line*'.

Just in case you aren't sure what a 'subject line', is... it's the line of text people see in their actual inbox and will determine whether your email gets opened and read, erased or even sent to the Junk folder.

Remember that you're competing with a number of other people for your prospect's attention so you've got to get this right.

Here are some approaches you can take when developing your subject lines:

Present a time limit - Save 24% in the next 24 Hours

Ask a question - Have you ever been in this situation?

Offer an Incentive - Your free industry report download

Offer information they'll find valuable - Read our SEO report today and be on Page 1 tomorrow

Invite them to an event - Join our business boosting webinar tomorrow

Don't be cryptic... at least too often - What the heck is this?

Being cryptic and mysterious might get people to open your emails initially but eventually they'll tune you out and even come to resent your company if the email doesn't match up with your subject line promise.

Basically when you sit down to write a subject line you want to do two things, CREATE INTEREST and FULFILL THE PROMISE OF THE SUBJECT LINE IN THE ACTUAL EMAIL.

It is not good practice to entice someone with an email subject line irrelevant to your actual message.

I also recommend you avoid tricks to get people to open your email. An example would be writing *RE: The info you asked for...* as your subject line if the prospect hasn't asked for information. This is cute and you'll probably get a high open rate initially but people will get angry if they haven't actually communicated with you or requested any information.

Creating Content That Gets Action

Have you signed up for any newsletters, email updates or alerts from companies that are delivered by email?

These emails fall into one of three categories.

- 1) The consistently interesting emails you're pleased to open and read.
- 2) Emails that are interesting some of the time and useless other times. You might open these emails... but then again, you might not. Open rates on inconsistent email campaigns will drop significantly over time.
- 3) Then there's the spammer category: an email you signed up for in good faith that ends up being of absolutely no value. Generally you'll trash these emails and/or unsubscribe from the list.

I'm not going to say it's easy to make sure your emails are going to be considered of high value by your list but with some planning and foresight it can be done.

Your list will open and read your emails if you THINK LIKE YOUR PROSPECT OR CUSTOMER.

The companies that end up with high unsubscribe rates or those who send emails that just don't get opened neglect this vital perspective. Don't ever send information that *you find interesting*, only send emails that your PROSPECTS WILL FIND VALUABLE!

No one cares about your company picnic or that Susan in accounting got a raise. Trust me, even if it was the most amazing company picnic ever, Joe Prospect will be indifferent at best but he'll probably just be irritated.

Frankly, most people in your office wouldn't open those emails.

However, if you're always thinking of what will interest your list you'll be in good shape. And don't worry, most people won't cut you off if you send one poorly thought-out email. But two? Maybe. So be very mindful of what you're sending. The whole point of an email campaign is to drive action on the part of your readers. Whether you want them to click through to your website, get someone to visit your shop or give you a call, the following types of emails will likely further your business goals.

Here are a few examples of the types of emails your list will find interesting:

- 1) A sale or promotion. Who doesn't like to save money?**
- 2) The offer of something free (in exchange for an action if appropriate)**
- 3) Information about a new product or service. But be sure it actually promises value to the prospect or customer. For example, if you're a brick and mortar shop that's launching a new online e-commerce store, it's a great idea to inform your list.**

- 4) A thank-you note for a purchase or a follow up when interest is shown. This kind of personal attention builds brand loyalty because people love acknowledgment.**
- 5) A recommendation based on past buying habits. Think Amazon.**
- 6) Industry Information. Advances in technology, lessons learned at a conference or trade show, highlights of an interesting magazine article and your analysis. Great for B2B emails.**
- 7) Lists or How-to emails. For example, The Top 5 Ways to Grow Your Business or How to Raise Capital During Tough Economic Times.**

Obviously you'll have to tailor the specifics to your particular industry and email list but these types of ideas will all get high response rates which is exactly what you should be going for.

Writing Like a Real Human Being

When you're writing an email, sounding like an approachable and real person is very, very important.

After all, the people you're emailing have asked you to write to them personally.

They've given you permission to communicate with them so you should sound like you're writing a personal email to them, an email that means something, not a faceless and tedious sales pitch.

I'll paraphrase what Bob Bly, a fantastic copywriter, says, 'Write like one friend sharing important information with another.'

Write like you speak, avoid jargon and 'big words' whenever possible and you'll see people will perform the action you'd like them to perform much more often; whether it's clicking a link, giving you a call or coming into your shop.

Most Email Service Providers, (the companies that actually send your marketing emails) provide an option to include your prospect's first name in the email subject line or the body copy just by including some simple code.

If you can do this, do it.

People will be even more receptive to your message if you address them by name.

Speak Directly To Your Recipient

One great way of building a connection with your email list is to write as if you're speaking directly to them.

Use the word 'you' just like I'm using it in this eBook.

Many companies use phrases like 'our customers' or 'our clients' or words like 'they', 'their' and 'them' when they should be saying 'YOU', 'YOURS' 'YOU'LL' etc.

Don't do this - 'Our clients love our new software upgrade package because it gives them the flexibility they need to succeed in their business.'

Do this - 'You'll love our new software upgrade package because it gives you the flexibility you need to succeed in your business.'

Get the picture? Great!

Informational Emails VS. Sales Emails: Achieving Balance

There's nothing I hate more than signing up for an email newsletter and then being bombarded with sales pitch after sales pitch.

This is the worst sort of email marketing and if you choose to take this route, you'll see unsubscribe after unsubscribe. In fact, many people will probably just hit the 'SPAM' button and you'll start having serious deliverability issues.

Poor deliverability means your emails will start going straight into the Junk Folders of your subscriber list, even if they've given you permission to keep in touch. And reputable email service providers hate sending email that's perceived as SPAM. In fact, one of the most well known ESPs only allow ONE SPAM complaint per 1000 emails!

People want valuable information sent to their inbox, that's why they have given you permission to communicate with them in the first place.

Unfortunately, many companies make the mistake of going nuts with selling through email and figure if they send enough sales pitches, the recipient will buy eventually.

It's very important you use subtlety when selling through email, so I recommend you send 2-3 informational emails for every sales email.

Informational emails are the type I've already discussed in the Creating Content That Gets Read section of this guide.

People will be much more likely to actually buy something when you send a sales email if you've already positioned yourself as a valued communicator.

The Balance

As an example, let's say your company produces software that automates social media functions for businesses.

You might send the following three informational emails:

- 1) An invite to a Webinar about using social media properly**
- 2) An article that talks about the growth of social media and your analysis**
- 3) An example of how NOT to use social media**

These three emails all provide information the subscriber will probably find to be of some value, especially since they signed up for a newsletter from a social media software company.

Now you've built up a level of trust because people know you aren't just trying to sell them something. Also, you have shown yourself to be an expert in the subject of interest.

Now it's time for the sales pitch and you can send your fourth email:

4) Be an Instant Social Media Expert with ACME Software

You still won't want to dive right into a sales pitch. You'll want to present all of the problems your prospects have with social media and only then should you present your software (or whatever product or service you sell) as the solution to all of these frustrating problems.

When And How Often To Send Email

This is a hotly debated topic and frankly I don't know how much of an impact send time actually makes.

Let me give you an example of why it's tough to be authoritative about this.

For a while, marketers built a consensus that sending email marketing on Tuesday was the most effective. Open rates were higher on Tuesday, people tended to click through to secondary websites more often and fewer people were unsubscribing.

Well what do you think happened?

Within a few months, everybody and their uncle was sending email marketing communications on Tuesday!

The positive trends reversed and marketers found that fewer people were opening their email on Tuesday, less clicks and traffic to websites was observed and unsubscribe rates shot through the roof...

So much for the industry paradigm.

My colleague and email marketing specialist, Greg Elliott of TwentyNine Marketing says to find out as much as you can about your list to help determine when to send.

One tip he offers is to schedule your email campaign to go out late at night. This way, your email will be the first one people see when they open their email account in the morning. We achieved open rates of over 50% using this one simple technique during an email campaign for a group-buying company.

Other interesting changes that have affected email marketing send times is the fact that people often use the same email address for work and personal communications.

I'm one of them. If you send me a work-related email to brian@brianbirnbaum.com on Sunday, I'll read it. And if you send me a personal message to the same address on Wednesday afternoon I'll read it... Wednesday evening. Nonetheless, if I consider you to be trustworthy and we have some type of relationship, your message will get opened.

At the end of the day, I think WHEN YOU SEND is much less important than WHAT YOU SEND.

If you've established credibility with your list, provide them with information they consider valuable and don't pester them with constant sales messages, they'll open your emails whenever you happen to send them.

How Often to Send Emails

I'll give you the short answer first.

If you send your communications once or even twice a week, you should be fine. This way you'll stay in your prospect's mind without being perceived as a pest.

There are exceptions. I subscribe to the newsletter of a certain inbound marketing company. This company provides me with relevant information nearly every day. They offer reports, webinars and eBooks that I consider generally helpful to my own copywriting business.

Do I open every single message? No, but I always read the subject line and then make a choice. I never dismiss their communications immediately.

For example, they might send me an email offering an in-depth examination of Web Analytics. This is of no interest to me and isn't a service my clients would come to me for... so I ignore it. But the very next day they might send a report about improving my social media presence, this I open and read.

The point is, I trust this company because they offer information that is potentially valuable about 90% of the time. Because of their high-value, I give them the benefit of the doubt and check out every subject line to see if they are offering something of interest.

This particular newsletter is from a large marketing company that can write relevant and timely emails constantly. That's their business.

But most businesses don't have the budget or frankly, something interesting to offer their list every day and that's fine. The smart move is to only provide contact when there's a true value to offer subscribers. Trying to stay in front of people just for the sake of visibility will be counterproductive.